24: Wrangell--38-39 G-3 (1820-23) 1842 Yakut
116, 231, 343

"Outside there are usually sheds for the cows, [39] which in winter are placed under cover and fed with hay, and in extreme cold weather are even brought into the jurte; whereas the horses are left to shift for themselves as well as they can, by scraping away the snow to get at the withered autumn grass. It is only when they are about to make a journey that they are given hay for a few days previously."

/127 cont./

122 speaking, but so poor that a shirt made of it falls off the body
123 in rags after a few days. To be sure, this is defective goods
[437] from Jakutsk /Yakutsk/ or Wiljuisk /Vilyuisk/, which in this respect is probably the last possible link in the long progression of merchandise that moves from the factories to Nishni-Nowgorod /Nizhni Novgorod/, Irbit, Tomsk, etc., steadily decreasing in quality. A reindeer which we wished to buy was not brought along, because the Jakute /Yakut/ had had a death in his family a few days before and during his attending to the burial the reindeer had gone astray. At least so he said, and he showed absolutely no desire to accompany us. Only when he saw the relatively rich presents in the form of powder, lead, flour, tea, ropes, and the like that Ssemjón received for his services did he decide to come along, at first probably with the intention of soon leaving us again after finding a substitute, whom he hoped to find somewhere in the vicinity.

122 Boldonó is not the only inhabitant of this region; /128/ on
123 the Olenék itself, above the mouth of the Ssiligír, we saw a
[342] tschum /choom/ and a large storage chamber. Its owner,
● [343] Gurtschúna, likewise a Jakute /Yakut/, was not present, but
[131] had gone to the Dolgán, who, according to Middendorff's map, are to be found from the mouth of the Anábara to the Jenisseí /Yenisei/ at Dúdino. The son of the schúlinga of this region was also supposed to be staying temporarily in the vicinity of the Ssiligír. And in fact we saw nets hung at the mouth of the Ssénjka, which probably belonged to him, but he was not to be seen, in spite of calls and shots. Ssemjón accompanied us a short distance beyond the Ssiligír, which flows into the Olenék from the right side with two branches at the junction and, after the Argáchala, is probably its most important tributary. Then he took his leave with many thanks and went back to his family, which probably was now willing to be found.

/204 cont./

122 son Iwán to take care of any officials passing through, and we
123 were thus entertained in the most friendly manner, and on the following day preparations were made at once for our unimpeded further journey.

On this evening I celebrated my birthday, for which for many weeks I had been saving a few cigars, /205/ which -- although, as I have said before, they had by no means come from Havana -- as a pleasure missed for a long time, put us in the jolliest mood. As of late we had had only pipe tobacco, which we had managed to get in Ssiktjách and Bulún with great difficulty and which could hardly last as far as Werchojansk. Besides, our host had set before us a delicacy that we liked very much, a mixture of butter and whey, called konják here. It is made out of cow's milk and, to be sure, what interested us most, here on the spot. To our great astonishment we had noticed a few horses and cows just a few versts from our present lodgings, which we had certainly not expected here, scarcely 30 versts from the timber line and at a latitude of about 70°. In Ssiktjách, located still somewhat to the south and much farther from the timber line, Mrs. Rjeschétnikow, who otherwise, as has been mentioned, was very successful in her acclimatization experiments, had told us about the impossibility of raising livestock in that region, and even much farther upstream on the Lena we were told that there were no horses, to say nothing of cattle, which, indeed, is scarcely found at all along the Lena beyond Jakutsk and its close surroundings.

[262]

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We learned from our talkative host various details about his livestock. It consists of about 20 horses and over 10 head of cattle. The former were brought here by his grandfather and the present specimens were born and raised here. They belong to a small, but vigorous breed, have a thick pelt, and withstand the terrible cold very well. Summer and winter, day and night, they remain out in the open, and only the foals are treated somewhat more gently. /206/ Cattle raising, on the other hand, requires much greater effort. The stable abuts directly against the yurt and gets its warmth from it, and also, in order not to let any cold in, has only one door, into the yurt, which in fact brings into

343

/206 cont./

231 the latter an atmosphere not exactly very pleasing to a European,
● 343] particularly when a few pet animals are brought nearer to the warm stove and therefore also nearer to the astonished traveler. The effort expended is well rewarded, however, and the cows here are praised for their abundant milk. They were acclimatized here only about eight years ago by Martin Borogón, but by no means represent, as we were inclined to assume, the extreme outposts of their breed in the north, and, on the contrary, as we were told here, cows -- not to mention horses -- are said to be raised with considerable success by the merchant Ssánnikow even in Ustj-Jansk, that is, at about 71° latitude and on the shores of the Arctic Ocean, to which the good pasture there is said to contribute the most. According to the view of our host, cattle raising would even be profitable at the mouth of the Lena, because there, too, excellent fodder is to be found -- the alpine pastures are indeed famous; why therefore should not the tundra pastures so similar to them, albeit much poorer, also be useful for dairy cattle? It could be determined by trying it. The mouth of the Lena is likewise inhabited by Jakut-speaking tribes, which, however, as I have already said, are actually of Tungus origin. Could this be the reason that, in comparison with the true Jakuten /Yakut/, which we had before us here in Dshejelák-Dshaná, they had less energy, particularly with regard to the livestock-raising brought by the Jakuten from their original southern homeland? The unsuccessful acclimatization attempts made by the Russians along the Lena may perhaps be attributed to the unfavorable location of the place -- the /207/ vicinity of Ssiktjách, for example, seems in fact to be unsuitable for raising livestock.

136 We learned a great deal more this evening about the fauna of the country. Only foxes are commonly found here, and in the neighboring tundra arctic foxes and reindeer, as well as hares and ermine. Squirrels, although of good quality, are not plentiful and therefore do not represent an article of trade; with regard to other fur-bearing animals, the sable is not found at all and the glutton only very rarely; as for beasts of prey, only an occasional wolf that comes over from the mountainous parts of the tundra; bears, on the other hand, are completely unknown. We were interested in the news that elk were found here only 15 years ago,

233 attained sexual maturity. During the time when they are "in heat" both the sires and the mares do all they can to avoid being harnessed, or allow themselves to be harnessed only for a short distance. When the rutting period passes, the horns of the males who were "in heat" fall off, and they begin quickly to get fat again.

The gestation period of the mares lasts eight months; calving begins at the end of April and continues until the appearance of the gnats. For this period each owner divides his herd into two parts; one part consists of bucks, and the other of mares. This is done because the bucks run much faster than the cows with calf and may exhaust the latter, and especially the calves which have just been born and are still weak. Along with the bucks are sent the reindeer dogs, which may tear the calves to pieces. The herd is reunited at the end of approximately one month, when the calves have already
[343] grown up and are able to follow after the bucks. If the reindeer are in the tundra at the time of calving, the herd of mares is driven to the woods, where they pick out places which are sheltered from the wind; in order to prevent the calves from being frozen, sheds--called daldaakaan--are sometimes built; these are in the shape of a semicircular shed made out of poles which are erected upright and covered on the leeward side with old pieces of "nyuk."[1](1)

1. A nyuk is a chamois-leather covering of a choom.

[204] Cold and late springs have a destructive effect on the reindeer litters; sometimes all the calves perish from the cold.

A calf requires close looking after only for the first two or three days--after this time he willingly follows his mother. There are cases where some mares calve in the autumn. In these cases their litter is doomed to death for sure, since the calves do not have time to get properly strong and they freeze to death, being unable to survive the severe cold. The mare which calves late is called orootii. Many of the offspring die as a result of physiological abnormalities; so, often the offspring is retained in the mother's womb, "tangled up in the guts," as the Dolgan put it; there also occur miscarriages, which are had for the most part by emaciated mares. In her whole lifetime a mare will bring forth up to twelve calves.

232 Reindeer are subject to many ailments. The most destructive are
233 anthrax--ulakan ɵlyy--and hoof cancer. In order to prevent anthrax the natives fumigate the reindeer with a bumblebee nest, with "amber" (fossilized resin), with juniper, or with a splinter of wood from a tree

(up to the beginning of the 20th century), is a humped iron scythe with a short, curved handle with which the grass was rather hewn (left and right) than mown. Later on this scythe was replaced by the Russian Lithuanian-type scythe and is never used nowadays. The Yakuts mowed the grass in the alasy and river valleys, gathering the hay into small sheaves, in which it often became soaked and rotted away, hence the quality of the hay was not usually very high.

In the winter, the cattle were kept in cold, dark and crowded khotons, which were usually built under the same roof as the dwelling; the animals were usually herded into the khoton only at night, while in the daytime they were left outside, in the frost. When there was a lack of hay, the cattle had little to eat, and were watered with icy water from a hole in the ice. The austere conditions under which the cattle were kept and the cold climate made them hardy, but unproductive. The Yakut cow yielded an average of 60 buckets of milk a year, and for two or three months in the winter was left unmilked. The mares were only milked in the summer, as a general rule.

Both the cattle and the horses were utilized in much the same way; they gave milk, meat, and hides, and served for transportation (oxen were usually harnessed to carts, while horses were ridden, or carried packs).

The predominance of pastoralism involved preservation of the semi-nomadic way of life. Until recently the Yakuts retained the custom of moving twice a year—round about May and October—from the winter to the summer camps, and back again. The winter dwellings were usually set up near the mowings, while the summer dwellings (which, incidentally, were comparatively close by the former) were built close to the pasture-lands.

Fishing, Hunting and Agriculture

The second branch of economy in importance was fishing. There was a tremendous amount of carp and a small fish called mundu in the abundant lakes, and coregonus muksun, white salmon and so on were plentiful in the rivers. For the poor people who had no cattle, fishing had long been a main occupation; the expression balyksyt (fisherman) is used in documents of the 17th century in the sense of "a poor man." At the same time, there were actually complete tribal groups who seem to have lived chiefly by fishing. These were the so-called "foot clans" of the Yakuts (Osekui, Ontuls, Kokui, Kiriks, Kyrgydays and Orgots). These tribes, who were clearly a remnant of the very ancient prepastoral population, were first discovered in the 17th century by Russians on the Vilyuy. For the Yakut pastoralists, fishing was an essential subsidiary occupation and has retained its importance until our own day.

The fish were caught chiefly in the summer, but there was also fishing through the ice during the wintertime. Use was made of seines which were chiefly made of horsehair, smaller nets, and sack-nets, etc. In the autumn there was usually collective fishing with a large seine, and the catch was divided among all those taking part, in accordance with ancient custom.

There is a hypothesis (V. L. Seroshevskiy) that Yakut fishing was only recently borrowed from the Evenks and Russians. In actual fact, fishing is the oldest form of economy among the population of the Lena region, including the ancestors of the Yakuts.

Hunting is the third, though far less important, branch of Yakut economy. Just like fishing, it goes back to very ancient times. During the

53: Tokarev and Gurvich E-4 (no date) 1964
RV2 Yakut RV2

people used wooden floors, under Russian influence. The size of the dwelling varied from 5 × 5 to 10 × 10 m, and in height was slightly higher than the head. 342

An essential part of every yurt was the hearth and the benches along the walls, as well as the simple uniform utensils. The hearth (ohokh) was usually built on the right of the entrance, close to the northeast corner. It comprised a low (about 25 cm, rectangular area made of clay inside a log frame; a cylindrical pipe, slanting slightly backwards, made of poles and coated on the inside with a thick layer of clay was built above the hearth; the bottom of the pipe was open at the front and acted as the mouth of the stove, while the top went through the roof and was almost always open (it was usually stuffed with something overnight); in the winter there was always a fire burning in the hearth to warm and illuminate the dwelling. The hearth was well ventilated and gave out a lot of heat as long as it was being fed with fuel, hence it used up a great deal of fuel. 354

The plank benches (oron), which were used for sleeping and sitting, stretched along all the walls, filling the gaps between the vertical columns and the bottom of the slanting wall. The benches were divided into different sections, each with its own name and purpose. The most respected bench was the one on the left of the entrance along the southern wall, from the middle to the corner, opposite the hearth—the so-called billirik; somewhat less honorable was the adjoining bench running from that corner along the western wall—the *бастын уҥа орон* (right-hand front bench); these two benches comprised the corner of honor. To the right was the head of the household's seat (*кэтэҕэрии*). The other benches on the left-hand side of the dwelling were intended for the young men, for workers and for ordinary male guests; on the right-hand side (towards the hearth) was the female half of the dwelling, where the women of the family and visiting women sat. 352 353

The furnishings in the dwelling consist of a small, round or square wooden table (ostuol) in the corner of honor, and several chairs (olokhmas) with the characteristic shape of a hollow cube with ribs made of flexible rods bent at a right angle and a seat made of a thin board; the furnishings also included various kinds of boxes and chests (made of wood and bound with leather), household utensils and so on; the quantity and quality of all the furnishings depended on the wealth of the householders.

A shed of the same design as the dwelling was usually built onto the northern side for the cattle, often under the same roof, though sometimes divided off from the living quarters by merely a thin wooden partition. There was a door leading from the dwelling to the cattle pen behind the hearth. The pen was built on the northern side so as to save some of the heat, but the close contact of the wintering cattle naturally increased the amount of dirt and made the air in the dwelling worse, where it was stuffy and dirty to begin with. 343

A small awning resembling a porch, and sometimes even a porchway (chaampy, *ҕуҕа*), was built outside in front of the entrance, particularly by the richer people. 342

The yurt was the ancient winter dwelling of the Yakuts; references to it can be found in 17th-century documents. In the 19th century the yurt also became the normal summer dwelling. The summer camp yurts were constructed in the same way as the winter ones, except for small differences (a light leather door on a frame and so on) and there was no cattle pen. Instead of the latter a summer calf pen (titik) was built

53:Tokarev and Gurvich E-4 (no date) 1964
RV2 Yakut RV2

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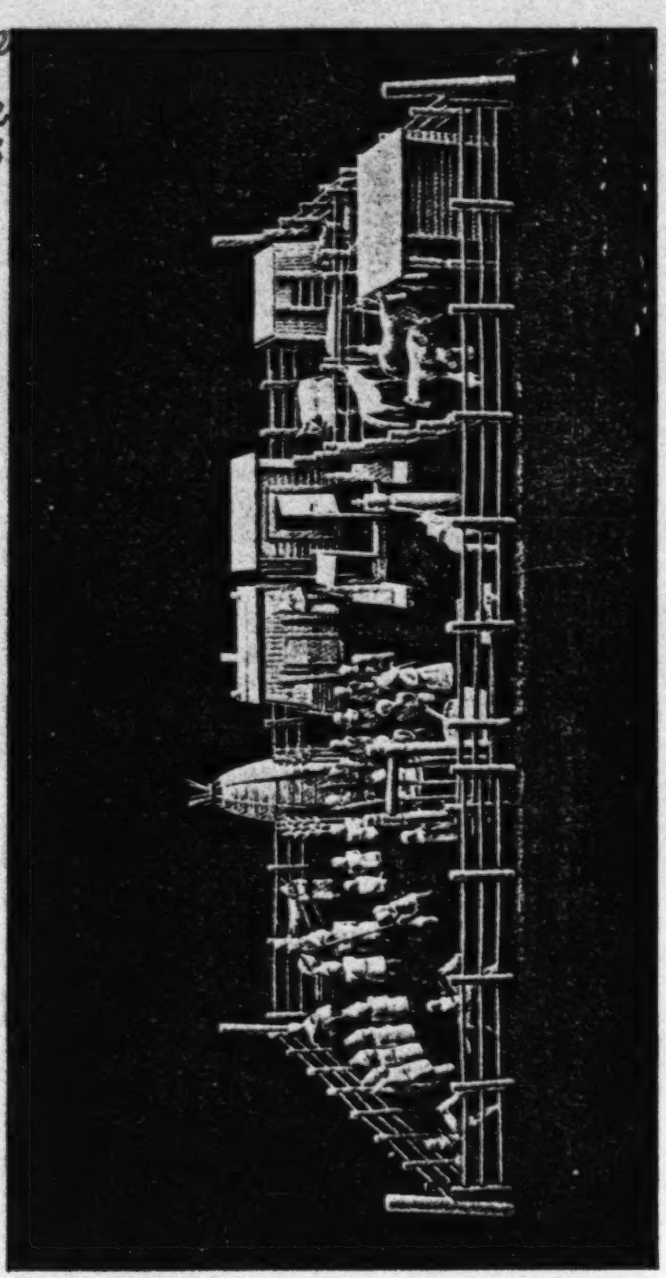

Yakut farmstead. Bone carving, 19th century.

55:Popov E-5 (no date) 1964 RV2 Yakut RV2
Dolgan

towards the reindeer in complete silence, and in summer they wore a protective gray coat the color of the stony tundra. Both in summer and autumn, until the first snow fell, the Dolgans used to trail wild reindeer with hunting dogs. They used poisoned bullets, and probably poisoned arrows as well in the past. As the poison they used rancid reindeer fat. The Dolgans living in the forest-tundra had wide skis of the Tungus type, but they could not use them in the tundra on account of the drifts. 224 [292] [481]

Hunting wild reindeer was only of importance as a source of meat and skin for the Dolgans' own semisubsistence economy.

For catching geese they set traps or arranged noose-type snares by the nests, and also drove moulting geese into nets set up in advance or harried them with dogs and then killed them with sticks. Ducks were trapped with special nets stretched across lakes. Partridges were also caught this way, though only in winter. Sometimes a live female partridge was tied to the net as bait. 223

Polar-fox hunting was of quite considerable economic importance and produced the principal commercial yield. The animals were mainly caught with traps and snares. As it seized hold of the bait, the fox pulled away a stick and released a log which fell onto it. The principle of this trap was borrowed from the Russians; up to that time they had only set self-firing bows on stakes driven into the ground to catch the animals. 224 [177]

The commonest type of fishing tackle both in summer and winter under the ice was an upright net 6–30 m long. The nets were made of threads or horsehair brought from Yakutya. In the Noril'sk Rayon the nets were used in the autumn in mountain rivers. The draught animal employed for this purpose was the reindeer and the ropes from the net were attached to its saddle. Other types of nets were used to a very limited degree. Seines were also commonly used for starlet, burbot, pike and grayling and trout with hooks prefabricated from bent 10-cm nails. Burbot was also caught with special bone points instead of hooks. 226 [492]

For traveling by water, mainly for fishing purposes, there were tree-trunk canoes brought by the merchants from the Yenisey, or bought from the Yakuts. There were few boats; it was only on the rivers Pyasina and Khatanga that they were used. 505

The Dolgans subsisted mainly on meat and fish. These were boiled or dried and the fish was also eaten in the raw, frozen and unfrozen forms. Fish was also kept in pits where it was pickled. Dead geese were kept buried in the ground. Certain roots were also eaten; they were dug up with reindeer horns or special wooden trowels. 262

The old type of nomadic dwelling among the Dolgans was the conical Tungus-type tent covered with thin panels of suede (in the summer) and deerhide (in the winter). In the old days the Dolgans, like the Evenks, built huts of the Yakut type, but without the windows, benches and hearth. 342

With the advent of the Russians the huts were gradually ousted by sled-tents or baloks. These are little huts on runners. The framework consists of wooden struts tightly covered with bright-colored calico, and on top, to keep it warm, there is a layer of deerskin and a canvas cover to guard against damp. In this kind of dwelling there are two windows with glass, an iron stove, bunks, a table, and sometimes even chairs. Whereas the erection of a pole tent required a great deal of labor during the cold winters, this type of tent can simply be pulled along the ground to a new site. These tents were borrowed in the last century from Russian merchants who traveled in them through the tundra. 342 177

Among other structures we should point out storehouses standing on high piles for keeping winter clothing and utensils. 343